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THE WAR POLICY

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LETTER OF THE PRESIDENT

To the Union Mass Convention at Springfield, Illinois.

Lincoln, A

EXECUTIVE MANSION,
WASHINGTON, *Aug.* 16, 1863.

Hon. James C. Conkling:

MY DEAR SIR:

Your letter inviting me to attend a mass meeting of unconditional Union men, to be held at the capital of Illinois on the 3d day of September, has been received. It would be very agreeable to me to thus meet my old friends at my own home, but I cannot just now be absent from this city so long as the visit there would require.

The meeting is to be of all those who maintain unconditional devotion to the Union; and I am sure my old political friends will thank me for tendering, as I do, the nation's gratitude to those other noble men whom no partisan malice or partisan hope can make false to the nation's life.

There are those who are dissatisfied with me. To such I would say, you desire peace, and you blame me that we do not have it. But how can we attain it? There are but three conceivable ways. First, to suppress the rebellion by force of arms. This I am trying to do. Are you for it? If you are, so far we are agreed. If you are not for it, a second way

is to give up the Union. I am against this. Are you for it? If you are, you should say so plainly. If you are not for *force*, nor yet for *dissolution*, there only remains some imaginary *compromise*.

I do not believe any compromise embracing the maintenance of the Union is now possible. All that I learn leads to a directly opposite belief. The strength of the rebellion is in its military—its army. That army dominates all the country and all the people within its range.

Any offer of terms made by any man or men within that range, in opposition to that army, is simply nothing for the present, because such man or men have no power whatever to enforce their side of a compromise, if one were made with them.

To illustrate: Suppose refugees from the South and peace men of the North get together in convention, and frame and proclaim a compromise embracing a restoration of the Union, in what way can that compromise be used to keep Lee's army out of Pennsylvania?

Meade's army can keep Lee's army out of Pennsylvania; and I think can ultimately drive it out of existence; but no paper compromise to which the controllers of Lee's army are not agreed, can at all affect that army. In an effort at such compromise we should waste time which the enemy would improve to our disadvantage; and that would be all.

A compromise, to be effective, must be made either with those who control the rebel army, or with the people first liberated from the domination of that army by the successes of our army. Now, allow me to assure you that no word or intimation from that rebel army, or from any of the men controlling it, in relation to any peace compromise, has ever come to my knowledge or belief. All charges and intimations to the contrary are deceptive and groundless; and I promise you that if any such proposition shall hereafter come, it shall not be rejected and kept a secret from you. I freely acknowledge myself the servant of the people according to the bond of service—the United States Constitution—and that as such I am responsible to them.

But, to be plain, you are dissatisfied with me about the negro. Quite likely there is a difference of opinion between

you and myself upon that subject. I certainly wish that all men could be free, while I suppose you do not; yet, I have neither adopted nor proposed any measure which is not consistent with even your view, provided you are for the Union.

I suggested compensated emancipation, to which you replied you wished not to be taxed to buy negroes. But I had not asked you to be taxed to buy negroes, except in such way as to save you from greater taxation to save the Union exclusively by other means.

You dislike the Emancipation Proclamation, and perhaps you would have it retracted. You say it is unconstitutional. I think differently. I think that the Constitution invests its Commander-in-Chief with the law of war in time of war. The most that can be said, if so much, is that slaves are property. Is there, has there ever been, any question that, by the law of war, property, both of enemies and friends, may be taken when needed?

And is it not needed whenever taking it helps us or hurts the enemy? Armies the world over destroy enemies' property when they cannot use it; and even destroy their own to keep it from the enemy. Civilized belligerents do all in their power to help themselves or hurt the enemy, except a few things regarded as barbarous or cruel. Among the exceptions are the massacre of vanquished foes and non-combatants, male and female.

But the Proclamation, as law, either is valid or is not valid. If it is not valid, it needs no retraction. If it is valid, it cannot be retracted, any more than the dead can be brought to life. Some of you profess to think its retraction would operate favorably for the Union. Why better after the retraction than before the issue?

There was more than a year and a half of trial to suppress the rebellion before the Proclamation was issued; the last one hundred days of which passed under an explicit notice that it was coming unless averted by those in revolt returning to their allegiance. The war has certainly progressed as favorably for us since the issue of the Proclamation as before.

I know, as fully as one can know the opinions of others, that some of the commanders of our armies in the field who have given us our most important successes, believe the

emancipation policy and the use of colored troops constitute the heaviest blow yet dealt to the rebellion; and that at least one of those important successes could not have been achieved when it was, but for the aid of black soldiers.

Among the commanders holding these views are some who have never had any affinity with what is called Abolitionism, or with Republican party politics, but who hold them purely as military opinions. I submit these opinions as being entitled to some weight against the objections often urged, that emancipation and arming the blacks are unwise as military measures, and were not adopted as such in good faith.

You say that you will not fight to free negroes. Some of them seem to be willing to fight for you. But no matter; fight you then exclusively to save the Union. I issued the Proclamation on purpose to aid you in saving the Union.

Whenever you shall have conquered all resistance to the Union, if I shall urge you to continue fighting, it will be an apt time then for you to declare that you will not fight to free negroes.

I thought that in your struggle for the Union, to whatever extent the negroes should cease helping the enemy, to that extent it weakened the enemy in his resistance to you. Do you think differently? I thought that whatever negroes can be got to do as soldiers, leaves just so much less for white soldiers to do in saving the Union. Does it appear otherwise to you? But negroes, like other people, act upon motives. Why should they do anything for us if we will do nothing for them? If they stake their lives for us, they must be prompted by the strongest motive, even the promise of their freedom. And the promise being made, must be kept.

The signs look better. The Father of Waters again goes unvexed to the sea. Thanks to the great Northwest for it. Nor yet wholly to them. Three hundred miles up they met New England, Empire, Keystone, and Jersey, hewing their way right and left. The sunny South, too, in more colors than one, also lent a hand. On the spot their part of the history was jotted down in black and white. The job was a great national one, and let none be banned who bore an honorable part in it. While those who have cleared the great river may well be proud, even that is not all.

It is hard to say that anything has been more bravely and well done than at Antietam, Murfreesboro, Gettysburg, and on many fields of lesser note.

Nor must Uncle Sam's web-feet be forgotten. At all the watery margins they have been present. Not only on the deep sea, the broad bay, and the rapid river, but also up the narrow, muddy bayou, and wherever the ground was a little damp, they have been and made their tracks.

Thanks to all for the great Republic, for the principle it lives by and keeps alive—for man's vast future—thanks to all.

Peace does not appear so distant as it did. I hope it will come soon, and come to stay, and so come as to be worth the keeping in all future time.

It will then have been proved that among free men there can be no successful appeal from the ballot to the bullet, and that they who take such appeal are sure to lose their case, and pay the cost.

And then there will be some black men who can remember that, with silent tongue, and clenched teeth, and steady eye, and well-poised bayonet, they have helped mankind on to this great consummation; while I fear there will be some white ones unable to forget that, with malignant heart and deceitful speech, they have strove to hinder it.

Still, let us not be over sanguine of a speedy final triumph. Let us be quite sober. Let us diligently apply the means, never doubting that a just God, in his own good time, will give us the rightful result.

Yours, very truly,

A. LINCOLN.

LETTER OF EDWARD EVERETT
To the Union Mass Convention at Springfield, Illinois.

BOSTON, *Aug.* 24, 1863.

James C. Conkling, Esq., Chairman, &c.:

MY DEAR SIR:

I received a few days ago your letter of the 12th, inviting me to attend "the grand mass meeting of the Unconditional Union men of the State of Illinois," to be held on the 3d of September at Springfield.

It will not be in my power to attend the meeting, but its objects, as explained by you, have my cordial sympathy.

The elections soon to be held will be of more than usual importance. They will throw light on the great question, how far it is possible for a free Government, controlled in its legislative and executive branches by popular choice, to prosecute with vigor a war of considerable duration, and which entails heavy burdens upon the community. As a representative government is mainly carried on by party organizations, the great interests of the country, both in peace and war, are too apt to become the arena in which the opposite parties strive for the mastery. Questions in themselves of secondary importance to the general welfare, are often contested with vehemence and passion, and that by men of ability and patriotism working themselves up to the belief that they are contending for matters of vital importance. Within my experience, the politics of the country have successively turned upon four or five questions, regarded at the time as of the greatest moment, but now utterly obsolete and forgotten.

These unprofitable contests, while they last, are the source of great embarrassment to the administration of the general Government for the time being, which finds itself thwarted in all its measures, however patriotic and beneficent their tendency, by indiscriminate opposition, aiming only at an electioneering triumph. This is a very serious evil in time of

peace, greatly enhancing the difficulties and burdens of public life, and highly detrimental to the public interests.

In time of war the evil becomes one of tremendous magnitude. The questions that then present themselves are naturally more important than ordinary political issues in time of peace, while every blow struck at the measures of the Government, though designed only to effect a change of administration, really affords aid and comfort to the enemy.

This will be the case when the opposition to government measures is sincerely dictated by honest difference of opinion. Nay, it will even be the case when the opposition is directed against measures palpably mistaken either on grounds of principle or policy. No Administration is free from error, and if party spirit is allowed to prevail, its errors will be severely criticised, usually exaggerated, and often fiercely denounced, till the attention of the country, instead of being fixed on the great and main questions on which all good patriots are agreed, is turned to side issues of minor and often factitious importance. In this way the administration of the Government is weakened and embarrassed, and the vigorous prosecution of the war, which every patriotic citizen admits to be the paramount object, is in some degree paralyzed.

I have doubted the policy of some measures of the Administration, and strongly disapproved others, but regarding the persons in power for the time being as the constitutional agents of the people for carrying on the Government, considering the war which has been forced upon us by the ambitious demagogues of the South as a question of national life or death—that to have the doctrine of secession established at the mouth of the rebel cannon, is simply to consign the country to a future of eternal border war, and to lay its dishonored fragments at the feet of foreign powers; I cannot but think it unpatriotic to attempt, for the sake of a party triumph, to make political capital out of the difficulties, or, if you please, the errors, unavoidably incident to the conduct of a war of such gigantic dimensions.

It is a pretty safe test, in cases of this kind, to ask how the views and measures of a party are regarded by the common enemy. Applying this test in the present case, nothing is more certain than that the triumph at the approaching elec-

tion of any party, organized and operating for the prostration of the Administration, would be regarded with unmingled satisfaction by the leaders of the rebellion and their sympathizers abroad. Indeed their last hope is in our divisions.

Candor requires me to add, that, if it is the duty of good citizens to abstain from factious opposition, it is, in time of war, not less the duty of the Administration, in civil as in military and naval affairs, to assume a position wholly independent of party. I am afraid it is impossible, in time of peace, to carry on a representative government except on a party basis. During the existence of war, especially of a war which tasks to the utmost the exertions and resources of the country, party support, in proportion as it is relied on, is an element not of strength but of weakness.

If all good men and good patriots in the loyal States, whether in or out of office—sacrificing, when necessary, a little of the pride of personal feeling and of party association—would cordially unite for the attainment of the objects, which they all approve, viz.: the vigorous prosecution, and successful termination of the war, the next New Year's day would witness the prostration of the rebellion and its leaders, the return of peace, and the restoration of the Union.

With the best wishes that the meeting at Springfield may promote these great ends, I remain, dear sir,

Very respectfully,

Your friend and fellow citizen,

EDWARD EVERETT.

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